

# Body image assessment in eating disorder patients: testing a new digital method.\*

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## Abstract

Body image disturbances have been a challenge for both researchers and therapists working with eating disorders in the last thirty years.

A extreme preoccupation with the body in combination with a general fear to gain weight is often cited as a causal and/or maintaining factor in eating disorders.

For too long, research on body perception in eating disorders has been focusing on accuracy of body size estimation in a rather simplistic way. There is a strong need for a new and valid instrument in body image assessment methods.

The present study reports on the development of a body image assessment instrument combining a sophisticated subject's image simulation technique and simplicity of administration.

Furthermore, we report on a pilot study, testing a new digital system in hospitalized eating disorder patients of the University Center St-Jozef (Belgium) and Villa Garda's Clinic (Italy).

Women with clinical eating disorders (n = 66) and normal controls (n = 34) were asked to estimate their actual (cognitive task), subjective (affective task), perceived by others (meta-cognitive task) and ideal (optative task) body size while using the computer-based simulation technique on a video screen.

In the cognitive and meta-cognitive tasks significant differences between patient group and control group were found.

It is argued that this new method is able to assess the perception of body size and body dissatisfaction.

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